

AETC News Clips



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11 Dec 01

Base closings delay is sought

Congressional leaders' plan envisions new round in 2005.

BY CAROLYN SKORNECK
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A military base closing plan sought by President Bush would be postponed from 2003 to 2005 under a plan developed by congressional leaders to try to break the logjam delaying a crucial defense bill.

The Republican-led House and a majority of GOP senators oppose a new round of base closings. However, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has said repeatedly he would recommend that Bush veto the \$343 billion defense authorization bill unless Congress includes a new round.



RUMSFELD

"Continuing to operate and maintain facilities we simply no longer need is unfair to the taxpayer and diverts resources that would be better applied to our warfighters," Rumsfeld wrote to the leaders of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees on Nov. 15. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff share this view, as does every one of my living predecessors."

The administration now has indicated it would accept a delay until 2005, as proposed by the two committees' chairmen — Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., and Rep. Bob Stump, R-Ariz. — and their top minority members — Sen. John Warner, R-Va., and Rep. Ike Skelton, D-Mo.

"We'd rather have it in 2003, but we'll take what we can get," said Glenn Flood, a Defense Department spokesman.

The issue has caused a weeks-long standoff between House and Senate negotiators trying to reconcile their two versions of the defense authorization bill for fiscal 2002, which began Oct. 1.

The Democratic-led Senate approved one round of base closures in 2003 in its defense bill. The Republican-led House, trying to derail any base closing plan, omitted it from its version.

The administration estimates one-fifth to one-fourth of base structures could be shuttered, freeing up \$3.5 billion a year for the nation's war-fighting needs.

Lawmakers dislike base closures because they can devastate local economies. They also question whether the nation has realized the savings promised from earlier closings.

The overall defense bills contain many programs of importance to the military, including 5 percent across-the-board pay raises, new housing benefits, and money for Bush's prized missile defense plan — the Senate provided the \$8.3 billion Bush requested, the House \$7.9

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Lawmakers look to delay base closings until 2005

billion.

To dislodge the bill from the impasse, the leaders of the two committees agreed to propose a compromise delaying the base closings to 2005.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill, is "fine with it," said spokesman John Feehery, since it was worked out by the key lawmakers.

Although Levin and Warner previously announced their support for one round, Stump had strongly opposed it, and Skelton was at most tepid to-

ward the idea.

Rep. James Saxton, R-N.J., who spearheaded the effort to block new closures as chairman of the House Armed Services' installations and facilities panel, said Monday he might support the 2005 proposal.

"I think it's an improvement over doing it sooner," Saxton said. "My reservations remain the same. But having said that, I've always been a team player, and if my leader decides this is the way to go, I will likely be a

supporter."

If the nation still is at war in 2005, Saxton said, he might try to call off the closings, but getting the defense bill passed is more important now.

Senate conferees are to review the proposal today, and House conferees Wednesday.

Saxton and other lawmakers cite the Sept. 11 attacks as a reason to keep all bases open. With a potentially limitless war on terrorism ahead, they said, this is no time to give up real estate that could be impossible

to replace if needed later.

The four previous rounds of base closings — in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 — led to the closure or realignment of 451 installations, including 97 major ones.

As in past rounds, an independent commission would create a list of bases to be closed or realigned. Congress then could approve or reject the entire list — no changes allowed — and the president then would sign or veto the entire list, with no changes.

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AETC
BASES

News Clips

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Answers to taxing questions

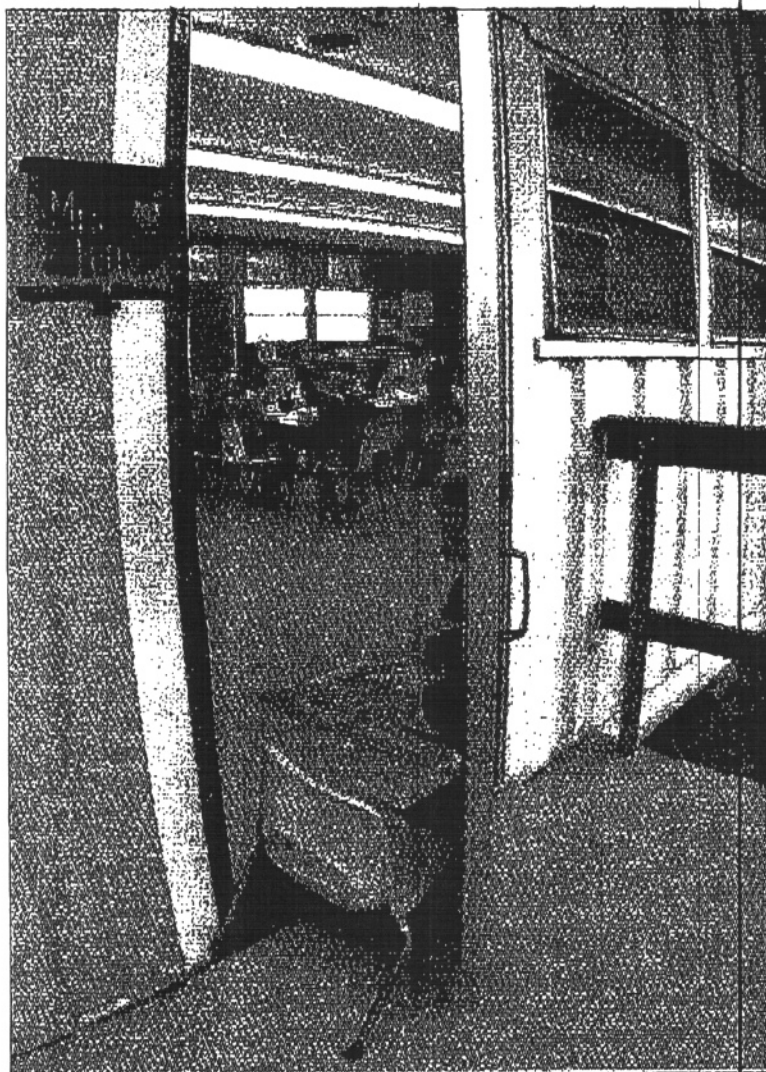
Enid News & Eagle staff writers Robert Barron and Tania Ward posed nine questions on the Eisenhower Elementary School sales tax ballot issue to local officials who helped design and promote the plan up for voter approval Tuesday.

Following are questions and responses as presented by: Kem Keithly, superintendent of Enid Public Schools; Todd Earl, head of the citizens committee promoting the school tax; Jon Blankenship, president of Greater Enid Chamber of Commerce; Mike Cooper, former Enid mayor and member of Vance Development Authority; and Karen Heizer, Eisenhower principal.

1. Why only Eisenhower? Why not expand the tax and raise money for several other Enid schools also in poor condition?

Todd Earl: Timing. Because of the likelihood of the appointment of another BRAC commission, we must act on the needs at Eisenhower

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An Eisenhower Elementary School teacher props open the door to a portable classroom so air can circulate through the building while the students are doing their classwork. (Staff Photo by CHRIS LANDSBERGER)

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in order to eliminate a demerit at Vance. This is the only remaining demerit upon which the citizens of Enid can act at this time. Anything that we would choose, as a community, to do after the date of the appointment of the BRAC commissioners will not be considered as they make decisions about the future of our military installations.

Jon Blankenship: It would have been our preference to include Eisenhower in a comprehensive school bond issue, but we couldn't afford to wait with a potential base closure round upon us. Improving the condition of Eisenhower has already been identified as the top priority by the Enid Public Schools. There is no question that many of our schools need capital improvements. Additional school improvement priorities are being established by the Enid Public Schools with the assistance of a comprehensive independent study by Total Program Management.

2. Is the base closing threat just an excuse to push through this tax and school project? If Vance is so efficient, why would the Air Force ever consider closing it?

Mike Cooper: Base closure is a reality, not a threat. Congress will decide this week if it will be in 2003 or 2005. When base closures started in 1988, we had five training bases. We have closed two and continue to downsize. We have closed all the bad ones. All the remaining bases are excellent. That's why the competition is tougher. The main issue this time will be consolidation.

Jon Blankenship: Quality-of-life issues were important in the last base closure round, but they are going to be critical this time around. The only thing that is within Enid's control is improving the quality of life that directly affects military personnel. Eisenhower is the top quality-of-life issue, and it makes no sense not to improve the condition of the school now. There is too much at stake. Vance Air Force Base employs 2,500 people and has a \$200 million impact annually.

Todd Earl: The need for pilots remains critical, but it would be irresponsible to assume that Vance is immune to the possibility of closure. Vance is highly efficient and

should be retained because of its outstanding service to the nation. But like other processes, the BRAC commission is not immune from becoming politicized. Let's not give the commission an excuse to close Vance when it can be easily resolved.

3. Why wasn't this done four years ago after BRAC identified Eisenhower as a problem? Why wait until another BRAC round is almost upon us?

Jon Blankenship: Improvements at Eisenhower were made as part of a large bond issue that passed in 1997. At that time, the school system priorities were roof replacement, electrical improvements and computers for many schools in Enid.

We initially thought we could wait to include the additional Eisenhower improvements in a future school bond. However, it became increasingly clear that waiting would cause the Eisenhower upgrade to be too late.

Kem Keithly: Eisenhower received some improvements from the October 1997 bond issue. However, priorities had been established for roof replacement, new wiring, technology and other needs. We did not know that another BRAC could be possible in 2003 until late spring of 2001. Our facilities were in the process of being evaluated by TPM at that time. It is strictly a matter of timing as we are preparing to develop priorities for all schools from the TPM report. Eisenhower had to be addressed sooner.

4. Why use a city sales tax to pay for school improvements? Usually property tax pays for school buildings.

Mike Cooper: The state law was created last year to allow for it. It is a different method.

Jon Blankenship: Traditional bond financing would not be cost efficient for this project. The legal fees and financing cost on a traditional school bond don't make sense for a \$700,000 project. Also, this is not just a single school improvement issue. It is a huge economic development issue that affects Enid and northwest Oklahoma. It makes sense for people in the entire trade area to help pay the cost.

5. If BRAC didn't exist and the future of Vance were secure, would Eisenhower still be the top priority for school improvements?

Jon Blankenship: Yes. When we took a tour of Enid schools recently, Eisenhower was clearly the school most in need of capital improvements. Children at Eisenhower are in old, portable classrooms every year from kindergarten through sixth grade. Without a BRAC round and a sense of urgency about Vance, Eisenhower would be included in an initial school bond proposal that begins to bring all of our schools to 21st century standards.

Todd Earl: It is unlikely, in the scenario that BRAC did not exist and the future of Vance were secure, that a single school would be identified as the sole priority. Most likely, under that scenario, a school bond/sales tax initiative addressing the top priorities at several of our district's facilities would be proposed. Because BRAC exists, we must address this identified need in order to position ourselves to address other facilities needs in our community.

6. Will this renovation actually solve the building problems at Eisenhower, or is this just an \$830,000 Band-Aid that will require more extensive work in a couple of years?

Todd Earl: This renovation will bring Eisenhower to 21st century standards for instructional facilities. This solution to the long-term needs of Eisenhower is being proposed at approximately half of the original estimated cost due to operational changes recommended by the Board of Education. This plan will also accommodate future expansion of the school should that become necessary.

Karen Heizer: The renovation plan will solve the current and immediate needs at Eisenhower Elementary school if some of the special education programs are shared with other schools that currently have empty classrooms. This campaign is not another Band-Aid treatment. What we have now is the Band-Aid, and it is falling apart. This newly proposed renovation would support a single classroom per grade level. In the past five years, Eisenhower school's population oscillated inconsistently from

203 to 240 students due to the mobility of the military.

7. Won't the Eisenhower issue just increase the already high sales tax rate in Enid? Is the sales tax rate so high that it discourages people from buying in Enid?

Jon Blankenship: No, this is an extension of an existing tax. The overall sales tax rate will not increase. The extension will begin in April 2002 and will expire when \$700,000 is collected, but no later than Dec. 31, 2002. This sales tax will expire about the same time as the one-quarter percent sales tax for streets and roads. Thus, Enid's sales tax rate would go down one-half percent at this time next year.

8. If conditions at Eisenhower school are so important to Vance, why has the Air Force not taken a public stance in favor of this improvement plan?

Todd Earl: The Air Force, along with other branches of the military, can neither support nor publicly oppose any question put before the voters.

Mike Cooper: Col. Doug Raaberg, the wing commander at Vance, was at the chamber planning meeting and said that education issues were going to be important.

9. If conditions at Eisenhower school are so bad, why haven't Eisenhower parents been complaining loudly for years?

Todd Earl: Eisenhower parents, in fact, registered some complaints, but the military families generally are here for such a short duration that organized support for the improvements has not developed. Furthermore, the administration and teachers at Eisenhower, as in our other schools, have done a great job of making the present facilities as efficient as possible. It is time to repay those efforts.

Jon Blankenship: Military families are often in Enid for short periods of time and do not have the opportunity to organize support for such improvements. We have had concerns about the condition of the school expressed by military families and other parents that have children attending Eisenhower. It is unacceptable to have children at any school in portable classrooms every year from kindergarten through sixth grade.

ANSWERS

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VANCE AFB OK

The Enid News & Eagle, December 7, 2001

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Base closings last but not least in Washington

By Robert Barron
Staff Writer

"Several other states are being pro-active about it, so Enid should continue its efforts. We need to be pro-active about what the community can provide."

—J.R. Reskovic

Another round of base closings is a reality, and quality of life issues will be important, said J.R. Reskovic, Enid's consultant in Washington, D.C.

Reskovic told members of Vance Development Authority to be a sticking point.

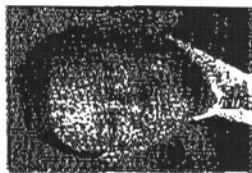
However, Reskovic said Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has threatened to ask President Bush to veto the legislation if language authorizing more base closures is not included.

He said the only "gray area" is what process the base-closing commission will use to determine which bases are closed.

"The president wants some veto authority, but Congress took that out" in previous BRAC rounds, he said.

"Several other states are being pro-active about it, so Enid should continue its efforts," he said. "We need to be pro-active about what the

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Mike Cooper

BASE

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community can provide."

There are three primary issues all involving quality of life that could count against Vance. Air Force Base during a BRAC inspection, Reskovic said, and the top one is Eisenhower Elementary School. Enid voters will decide Dec. 11 whether to fund improvements at the school by a quarter-cent sales tax.

Jon Blankenship, executive director of Greater Enid Chamber of Commerce, said the problems with Eisenhower are getting a lot of exposure, and there is discussion in the community. Blankenship said he thinks voters believe Eisenhower school is an economic development issue as much as it is a school issue.

The other issues are making sure there is the availability of affordable housing and the availability of health care. Reskovic said few physicians in Enid will

accept that care, the military PPO. Mayor Doug Franz said local physicians have told him they do not accept it. Franz said he would like a larger selection of affordable housing.

In other VDA business, Kelly Murphy-Sally reported on the Vance scholarship fund. The Air Force pays 55 percent and the city of Enid pays 25 percent of the cost of college hours.

The city has paid about \$170,000 a year to the program, she said. At present, there are 47 under-graduate students at Northern Oklahoma College, four graduate and 16 undergraduate students at Northwestern Oklahoma State University and one MBA graduate student at Oklahoma State University.

In the near future an accelerated MBA program will be offered through NWOSU. It will be broadcast from Clinton, University in Lawton, said.

ECONOMIC

VANCE AFB OK

The Enid News & Eagle, December 7, 2001

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Ex-POW says America came back stronger from Vietnam War

By Scott Fitzgerald
Staff Writer

Love of country, which retired Brig. Gen. Robinson Risner sees now in America's response to recent terror attacks, arouses memories of his time in captivity with his comrades as prisoners of war in Vietnam.

"We came back better people. We were stronger, better persons. We were more patriotic and had more trust in God," said Risner, a retired U.S. Air Force pilot who was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1974 for his accomplishments during a distinguished military career.

Risner was guest speaker Thursday at an Air Force Association dinner in association with Vance Daedalians at the Vance Club.

In September 1965, Risner was shot down piloting a F-105 fighter bomber over North Vietnam. He was flying a few hundred feet above ground level at more than 500 mph as he tried to stay below radar.

As fire erupted on the aircraft, Risner prepared to eject.

"That was a wonderful engine that suddenly got indigestion," he told the audience.

The distinguished commander, whose picture graced the cover of a 1965 issue of Time magazine, narrowly escaped

death when one of his armed captors aimed a loaded and cocked handgun at Risner as he was taken into captivity.

During a 6½-year period of captivity, Risner was in solitary confinement for four years.

"People later asked, 'How did you make it?' It was purely faith in God and love of country," Risner said.

During the end of his captivity, when he was allowed to join with other American POWs, Risner said he learned unity equals strength.

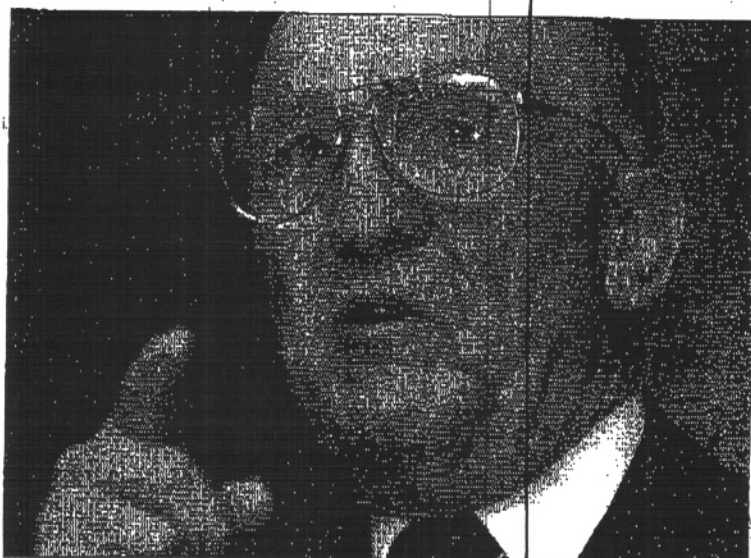
He and the other American prisoners held church services every Sunday during their captivity in a Hanoi prison. They began each service reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

"We were warned there would be more torture, less food and more solitary confinement if we continued our services," Risner said.

But each of the prisoners elected to continue the services in spite of the warnings.

And, soon they began one of their services singing the national anthem.

"Then came the words to 'The Star Spangled Banner' in downtown Hanoi. I never felt so strong. I felt nine feet tall and going bear hunting with a switch. I wish you could have heard it. When the chips are down, you see how America responds," Risner said.



Brig. Gen. Robinson Risner, a retired Air Force pilot inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, is shown in this file photo. Risner recalled his days as a POW after being shot down over North Vietnam in 1965 at the Air Force Association and Vance Daedalians dinner Thursday.

Vote yes Tuesday for the future of Enid

There are a lot of reasons to vote YES on Dec. 11. If you believe we have a responsibility to the children of our community to provide them with a good education in a safe environment, YES should be your vote. If you believe that Vance Air Force Base is an important part of the economic security of this community, YES should be your vote. If you believe that we should be working together to resolve problems and build a better future for all our families and businesses, YES will be your vote.

I can think of no better way to provide the improvements needed to demonstrate that we support the families at Vance, just as we support families from this community. Vance Air Force Base has provided Enid with many opportunities: economic, educational, and cultural. In order to continue our mutually beneficial relationship, we must all get behind the plan to improve the facilities at Eisenhower Elementary School.

Please take the time to vote Dec. 11, and vote YES for our future.

Bert Mackie
Enid

Tax vote an economic issue for all

Please get out and vote "yes" Tuesday for extending the sales tax for a few months.

This is an economic issue for us all. We must do everything to make Vance untouchable when the next BRAC round comes, and Eisenhower school is a most vital step.

Too many stay-at-homes could cost us our air base. Please make it a point to vote for a positive future.

Doug Frantz
Mayor of Enid

Eisenhower tax vote raises some questions

I have some questions on the tax vote for Tuesday.

How many of the kids at Eisenhower are actually Air Force kids? I know there are several that live in our neighborhood that go to Hoover.

Is all this renovation at Eisenhower going to solve a problem or just move the problem to other schools? I have heard that there will be portable classrooms moved to other schools to help accommodate some of the handicapped kids that are going to be moved around, although the portables are supposed to be one of the things being alleviated by the tax vote.

Will building new classrooms solve any of the termite problems at Eisenhower or will the termites just start eating the new school? The termites at our school are bad enough they were swarming in a classroom with students in it one spring. I realize that some of the students at Eisenhower are not there for the duration because they are Air Force and move, but some are there for longer.

Our PTA helped fund our school's computers, air conditioners, playground equipment and many other expensive items. If the PTA hadn't helped with these, our school would be lacking in lots of areas. All I want is for my kids to have the same advantages as everyone else, and I don't know whether all that money going to help Eisenhower is appropriate.

I do support Vance and feel it is very important to our community, but just because this one thing passes doesn't mean another one will pass in future years that would help other schools.

On another note, if Oklahoma would pass a lottery, how much money would go to education that would benefit all schools in the state? I bet it would be a lot.

Brenda Poplin
Enid

Enid must learn to profit from mistakes of the past

The sales tax vote for Eisenhower school Dec. 11, is critical for our economic well-being. Vance employs 2500 people and has a \$200 million impact on Enid.

With another base closure round coming, the risk of losing Vance Air Force Base is real. Upgrading Eisenhower Elementary School will help us in the all-important base review process!

A one-quarter cent sales tax extension (no added tax) for about seven months is a cheap price to pay when weighed against the incredible cost to our economy of a Vance closure.

No one thought Champlin would close the refinery 20 years ago...or that Union Equity would ever leave Enid...but they are both no longer here.

Learn from our mistakes:
Vote Yes for Eisenhower.
John L. Cromwell, Chairman
Garfield County Industrial
Authority

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Glenn Miller Holiday Concert

recreates war radio show

Is anyone else as amazed as I that Montgomery has not one but several outstanding volunteer concert musical ensembles? Our city is very lucky to have so many people who want to share their musical talent through a variety of musical troupes.

The Montgomery Choral presented its Christmas concert on Sunday and the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra will once again ring in the holidays with seasonal concerts next Sunday and on the following Tuesday.

Tuesday evening, the Recreators and the Capitol Sounds Concert Band added a bit of nostalgia to the holidays with a musical program in tribute to Glenn Miller, the famed Big Band leader of the 1930s and 1940s.

During the early 1940s, Miller — famous for "Moonlight Serenade," "In the Mood," "String of Pearls," and other favorite tunes — was stationed at what was then called Maxwell Field. Assigned to the Eastern Fighter Command, he became active in the base's band and helped organize a holiday show, which was broadcast on radio throughout Alabama and neighboring states.

For the last 20 years, the city of Montgomery has joined Maxwell Air Force Base in presenting a recreation of that radio show as a free gift to the residents of the area. In the past, an Air Force band dressed in period uniforms presented the concert, but as an alternative this year, the two local bands were invited to participate.

Formed in 1974 under the auspices of the Montgomery Parks and Recreation Department to preserve and perform Big Band swing music, the Recreators in their red jackets saluted the holidays in musical style. So well-known is the band, Larry O'Brien, the current leader of the Glenn Miller Orchestra, often recognizes the Recreators when his troupe performs in the Alabama and Florida areas.

Walt Hines is president of the band and Bill Bigham is the vice president. Stan Gregory is treasurer; Gil Jennings is assistant treasurer; Ken Sterns is secretary; Al Howey, Cecil Prescott, Lew Simons and Don Sims are section leaders and Cecil is also the chief music arranger.

Ken and Al are also members of the Starlighters, the band's vocal ensemble. Singing with them are Su Dawson, Barbara Howey, and a vocalist well-known to Montgomerians, Susan Harwood. A city native, Susan now splits her time here and in Connecticut, and is fondly remembered for her numerous vocal presentations and for her co-hosting duties with Dr. Sam on their long-running morning radio show on Mix-103.3.

Organized as the Montgomery Community Concert Band in 1970, the Capitol Sounds Band changed its name almost two years ago and continues to present free public concerts to support the city, county, state and military communities. Also sponsored by the city's department of Parks and Recreation, the band performs regularly. Gene Moseley was the announcer for both musical programs.

Before the concert, Lt. Gen. Donald Lamontagne, commander of Air University, and his wife, Karen, and Montgomery's mayor, Bobby Bright, and his wife, Lynn, welcomed special guests to a reception in the Montgomery Visitor Center in Union Station. A tempting array of hors d'oeuvres was offered throughout the center, then guests were transported by trolley to the Civic Center, where the concert was presented. During intermission, the same guests were invited into the River Room for dessert and coffee.

MAXWELL AFB, AL

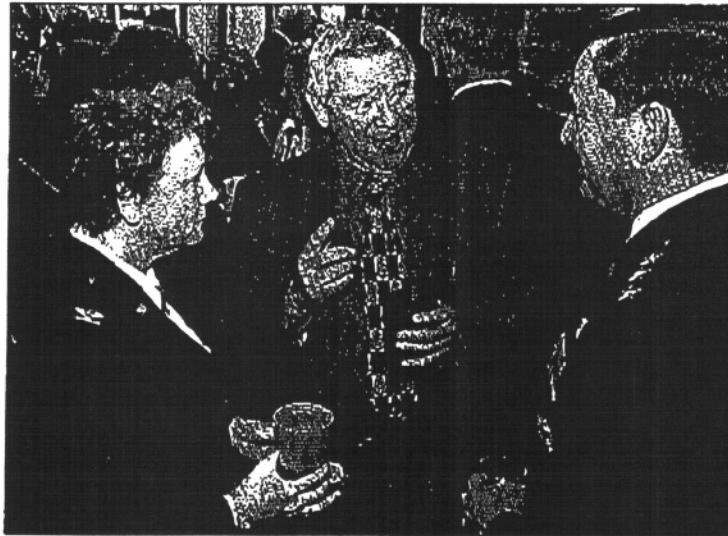
Montgomery Advertiser, 10 Dec 01, 12G

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David Alan Planchet Staff

Lt. Gen. Donald Lamontagne talks with Cheryl and Clinton Carter and Judge Sally Greenhaw during the Glenn Miller Christmas Concert pre-party at Maxwell Air Force Base.



David Alan Planchet Staff

Wing Commander Col. Fran Martin talks with Ray Dunwoody and Lt. Gen. Donald Lamontagne at the Glenn Miller Christmas Concert pre-party.

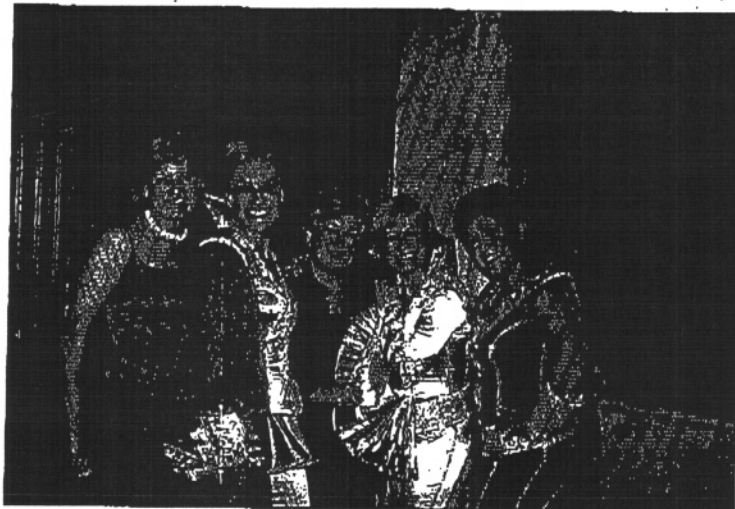
MAXWELL AFB, AL
Montgomery Advertiser, 10 Dec 01, 12G cont.

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Special to the Advertiser

Before entering Radio City Music Hall, Elizabeth Via Brown, Mary Lou Brown, Gloria Rawlings and Ginny Cum-bus stop for a picture taken by Nancy Bradford.



Elizabeth Via Brown Special to the Advertiser

MAXWELL AFB, AL
Montgomery Advertiser, 10 Dec 01, 12G cont.

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Felt at home

To the people of Wichita Falls, Texas!

Just wanted to send a short letter of appreciation. Our son is serving at Sheppard Air Force Base in your town and he is 2,000 miles from home. I woke up on Thanksgiving morning counting my blessings and giving thanks for my wonderful husband, children, family and friends. Then I started to worry about our son in your town as he would be spending his first Thanksgiving

away from home. I spoke with our son that morning and he told me about "Operation Thanksgiving," where the people of your town take an airman into your homes and share your holiday with these young men and women. This act of love, Christianity and caring filled my heart with joy and gratitude! I stopped worrying about our son being so far from home and he assured me that he had a wonderful holiday!

So thank you, Wichita Falls, and may God bless you all!

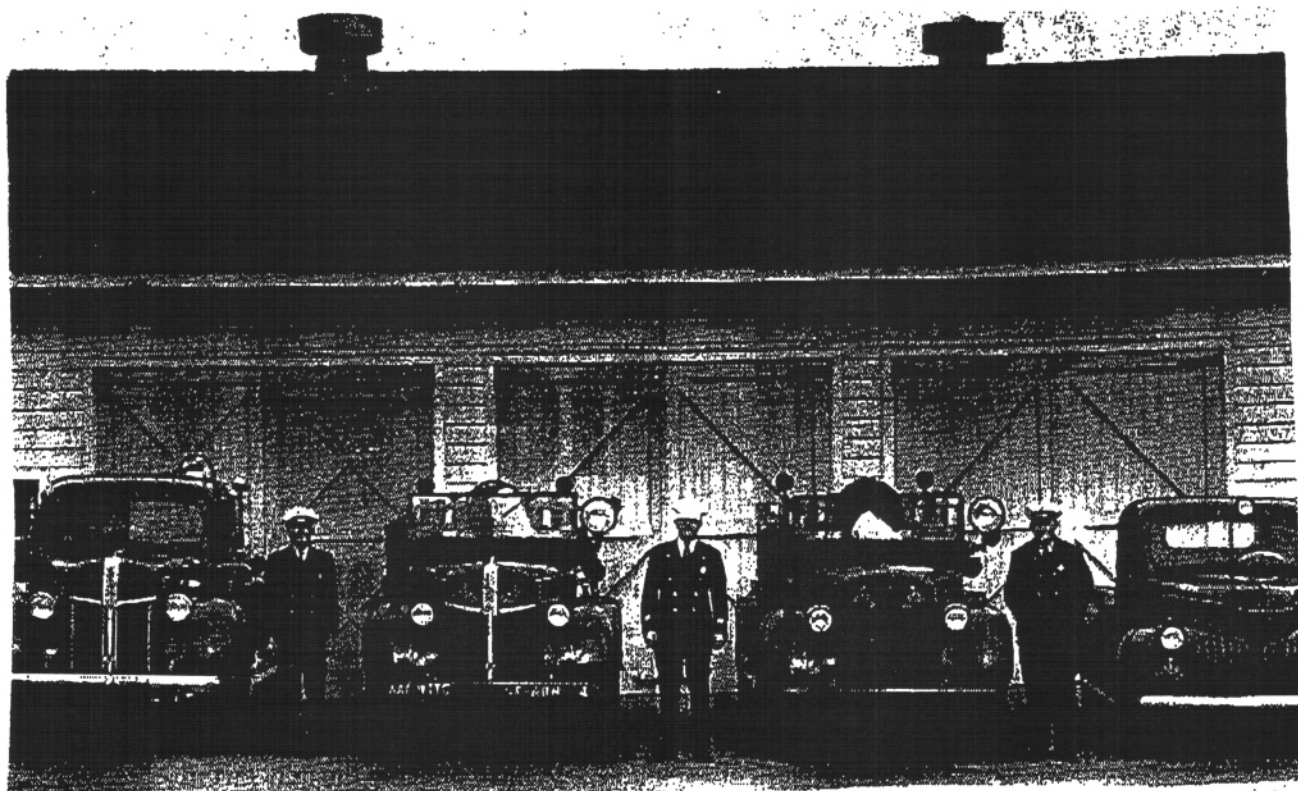
*Connie McCord
Cornelius, Oregon*

Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, Texas
Times Record News, 9 Dec 2001, Page 7B
Email: www.trnonline.com

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Full circle

SAFB fire department to revert back to civilian force



Sheppard Field's fire vehicles along with the department's officers are pictured in this 1941 photo.

Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, Texas
Times Record News, 10 Dec 2001, Page 2B
Email: www.trnonline.com

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Lynda Stringer

Times Record News

Sixty years ago, 30 men — all civilians — posed in front of shiny new fire trucks in front of a Sheppard Field fire station.

There is no young bravado among them. Their faces are lined with middle age, too old to go off to war. Yet they wore a badge of courage and honor that was their way of serving their country during World War II.

Air Force firefighters manned the department after the war when the Army Air Corps field became an Air Force base in 1948, and eventually civilian and military firefighters joined forces to work side by side.

But today its civilian heritage is coming full circle, as the 16 Air Force members of the 78-man department prepare to leave Sheppard for good. The Sheppard Fire Department will become an all-civilian force by March 2002, said Sheppard Fire Chief Jeff Sukalski said.

Lester Lee Rose, who died in 1950 at the age of 53, was among those to first don the Sheppard fire uniform.

His son, Dale Rose of Wichita Falls, was fresh out of high school and was joining up with the rest of the young bucks sparked by Pearl Harbor and America's entrance into World War II. The 1941 photographs, curled at the edges and yellowed with time, are treasured memories of a father he lost too early.

"He'd been a farmer all his life," Rose said. "He was older than the draft age, so he was one of the first they hired."

The early department was equipped with the latest fire-

fighting equipment available at the time, said Don "Tiny" Criswell, who spent his firefighting career first at the Wichita Falls Fire Department from 1957 to 1967, and then at Sheppard before retiring in 1989.

Back then, the city was using a manual pull station mounted on a telephone pole. A board located at the fire station listed the location of each numbered box. The glass was broken, you pulled the alarm and the sound was transmitted to a fire alarm telegrapher at each fire station.

Sheppard's system was more advanced, incorporating a telephone mounted on a pedestal on the flight line. There was a sound power unit in the alarm room that was answered by a dispatcher. The person initiating the alarm would tell the alarm room operator the box number and location of the fire and crews were then dispatched to the scene.

The firefighters' crash suit went through a transformation in the early to mid-1970s. The suit used since the early '40s was made out of 80 percent asbestos with a silver-colored aluminum outer layer and a quilted inner layer.

The suit enabled firefighters to battle aircraft crash fires that generated intense heat and flames. "The silver deflected the heat and the asbestos acted as a buffer," Criswell said. The silver hood-

ed helmet contained a 24-karat gold faceplate that deflected heat off the face.

Hunter said he was issued an asbestos suit when he was first assigned to the Frederick, Okla., Auxiliary station. "Then better technology started coming around," Hunter said.

But, doing away with asbestos in the suits cut back on the amount of heat firefighters could withstand, said Sheppard's deputy fire chief Master Sgt. Rod Ryalls.

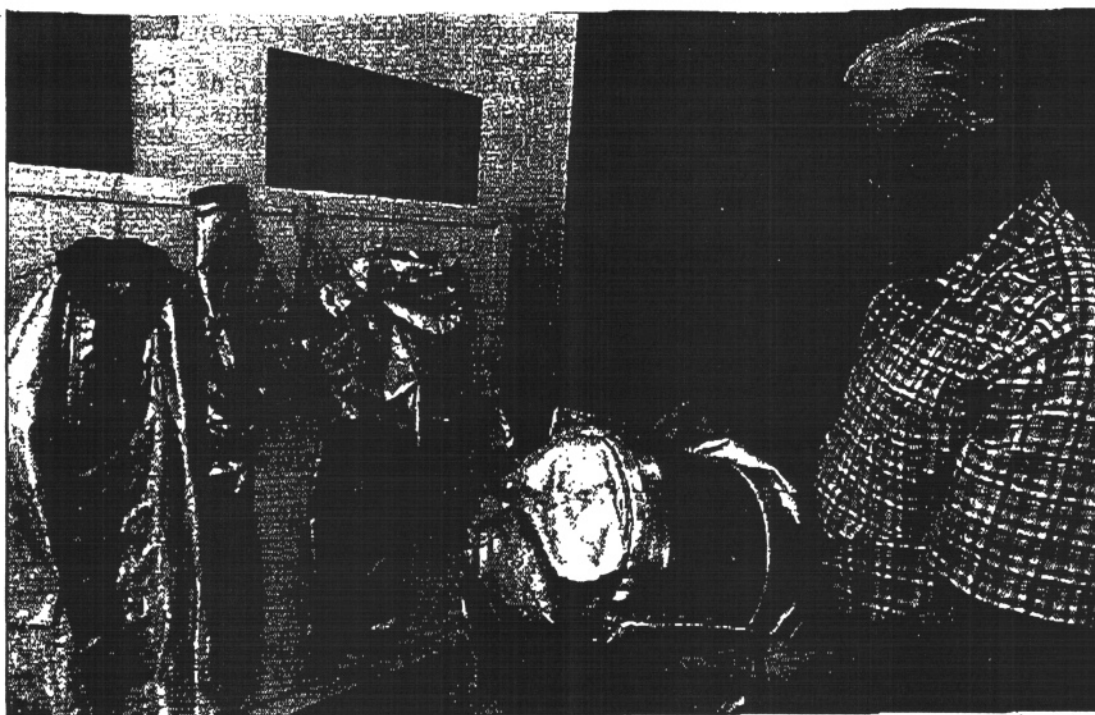
"The old suit could take 3,000 degrees, it's 2,200 now," he said.

The astronaut-style helmet has been scaled back today to a hardhat helmet, used for both structure and crash fires. It has a silver flap attached to the back that protects the ears, neck and shoulders. Today's smaller faceplate still has gold in it to deflect the intense crash fires.

"The problem with the hoods was they allowed fuel vapors to come up from the bottom and flash and ignite inside the protective gear," Hunter said.

Those assigned to fight structures and, those that responded to crashes used to work independently of each other. Today, they share the main firehouse, while Station No. 3 — a former Strategic Air Command underground alert bunker called "the mole hole" — and the Frederick station are strictly aircraft crash response stations.

In his early career at



Gary Lawson/Times Record News

Jim Pettijohn holds the bulky helmet that goes with the crash bunker gear once worn by firefighters at Sheppard Air Force

Base. The old suit, comprised of aluminum and asbestos, was heavy and cumbersome but very effective in intense fires.

Sheppard, Hunter said it was a lot of work due to the abundance of wooden structures and smoking inside the facilities.

"Fire protection has come a long way, we stayed very busy," he said.

Ryalls said the ratio of civilian and military firefighters until recently was about 50-50. With the plan to go to an all-civilian force, which is 95 percent complete, the numbers are dwindling quickly.

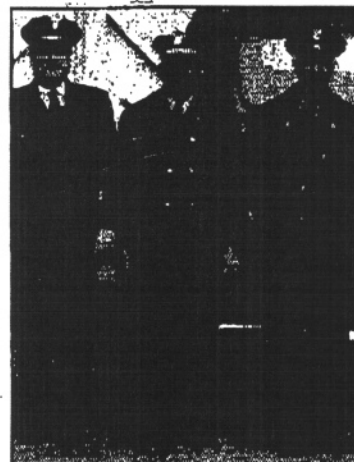
"The fire department and security forces squadrons are swapping military and civilian authorizations," Smith said. "Security forces are becoming all military."

To make that happen, Smith said, AETC is moving the security forces' civilian positions to the fire department and the military slots are being added to the secu-

rity forces. Sheppard's military firefighters, including Ryalls, will be transferred to bases "that have a higher deployment tasking," Smith said.

So, like the 1941 Sheppard Field, the civilians are staying behind to continue the mission of protecting the base and its pilots. Sukalski said many of the ones with military rank would eventually find their way back.

"Ninety-five percent of the guys we hire are former military," he said. "It's the lifestyle they like. They just take off one suit and put on another."



Courtesy

Members of the Sheppard Field Fire Department are pictured in this 1941 photo. The all-civilian force included Lester Lee Rose, center, the father of local WWII veteran Dale Rose.

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